

# HOSTS AND GUESTS

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## The Anthropology of Tourism

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## Tourism in Tonga: Troubled Times

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The Kingdom of Tonga lies in the heart of fabled Polynesia, approximately 550 miles southwest of Samoa and 450 miles southeast of Fiji. The tiny kingdom encompasses approximately 289 square miles and supports an estimated (1975) population of 100,105—an average density of more than 346 persons per square mile. However, the actual usable land available for settlement is only 190 square miles, giving a true population density of 532 persons per square mile. The population is not evenly distributed and the largest island of the group, Tongatapu (100 square miles with a population of 52,000) is the economic center for the archipelago. This island has also been the historic residence of the aboriginal (Royal) leaders, and Nuku'alofa—the largest city, the capital, and the main tourist target—is located there.

Formerly a British protectorate, Tonga achieved independence in 1970 and entered the British Commonwealth of Nations. The Constitutional Monarchy dates to 1875 and the current monarch, His Majesty King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV, acceded to the throne in 1965. Tongan is the official language, English is the second language and most Tongans are bilingual. The population is also ethnically uniform: 98 percent of the population are Tongans, and all are stalwart Christians. The 1966 census listed 77,429 inhabitants, only 61 of whom failed to declare a religious affiliation.

Tourism is nascent in Tonga, but the number of visitors is increasing annually due to extensive overseas promotions that stress, in colorful brochures, the beauty of "unspoiled" Polynesia, where English is spoken and where there is a "real live King (and Queen)." Although Tonga is the last surviving Polynesian Kingdom, it is far from being the "storybook" land of the culture brokers. It is an overpopulated and underdeveloped tiny nation, struggling to maintain its cultural integrity in the face of twentieth-century changes. There are serious internal economic problems in Tonga, for which tourism might be the panacea. This case study

examines the impact of tourism on the Tongan economy and the social and cultural problems associated with the advent of recent mass tourism.

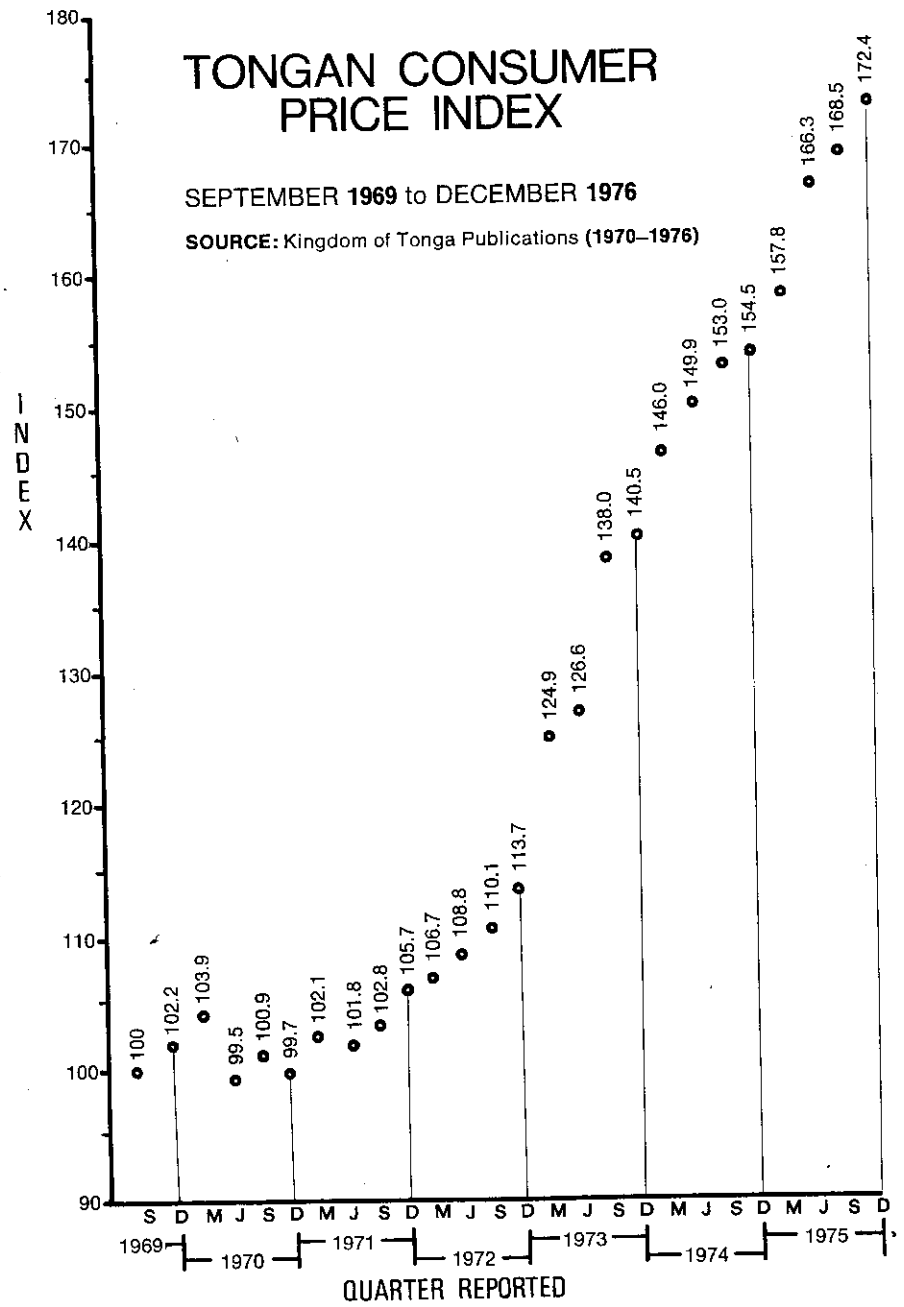
### The Economic Problem

Tonga is primarily an agricultural nation of small landholders. Despite Government efforts to modernize and increase food production, the natural resources of the islands are inadequate to feed the growing population. For greater cash-flow, primarily to meet Tongan consumer demands for Western products, Tonga has become an exporter of agricultural commodities. It is germane to note, however, that foodstuffs (especially meat and chicken) account for almost a third of Tonga's annual imports. In 1973, for example, total exports amounted to almost us\$5,000,000, with copra being the most important export (at us\$3,347,000). Dietary inadequacies among Tongans, occasioned by high food costs, are best assessed by the Minister of Health who stated in 1973 that protein-calorie malnutrition is prevalent among young Tongan children to a disturbing degree. In the same year seventeen cases of severe "nutritional deficiency" required hospitalization, two of which became fatalities.

Spiraling inflation has eroded Tongan buying power over recent years, as indicated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Established in 1969 with a September base of 100.0, the CPI is based on the purchasing power of a "typical" Tongan family earning less than us\$37 per week. Heavily biased towards food items (64 percent of all items on the index), the CPI has risen steadily (Figure 1) to 172.4 in six years. Increases in food prices, both domestic and imported, have consistently contributed most to this upward trend. In one of the largest overall increases, 11.4 percent in the quarter of June-September 1973, the fruit and vegetable component of the CPI increased by 46.9 percent. In the second largest increase, 11.2 percent from December 1972-March 1973, this same sub-group of basic staples increased by 33.1 percent, while the cereal subgroup (bread, flour, and rice) increased by 31.6 percent.

Unemployment is another critical economic problem. In an island world where land is extremely important, many adult Tongans are without land. Although every Tongan male, upon reaching the age of sixteen (and becoming a taxpayer) is entitled to some "bush land" for crops and "town land" for a home, there simply isn't enough to go around. The Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance pointed out that in 1966, 59 percent of all men over sixteen years of age who were entitled to tax allotments were landless and, no doubt, this proportion has increased by 1971. Even if the unused areas are used it may provide employment for about thirty-four hundred men, still leaving thousands unemployed.

Figure 1



The Secretary also noted that every year, only about 5 percent of the Tongans who leave school are able to find employment in the Tongan economy.

To offset this serious lack of domestic employment, thousands of Tongans since 1971 have gone overseas to work, primarily in New Zealand. Their remittances to Tonga have been substantial: in 1971-72 us\$1,250,000 and for 1972-73 us\$2,000,000. This money, together with donations, gifts, and contributions from other overseas sources (us\$2,150,000) have helped to offset the Tongan trade deficit. In addition, individual men, returning to Tonga after the expiration of overseas work permits, often bring back a substantial amount of cash (once estimated to be an average of us\$1,800 per man). Although this work program was initiated at the request of the Tongan government, it has been criticized as being a form of economic subservience. The revenues obtained from this unique "export item" (diligent and hardworking Tongans) have, in fact, benefitted the Tongan economy, but they have also created some domestic problems: family life is disrupted for male wage earners who go overseas, and divorce appears to be increasing.

Tonga, as with the rest of Oceania, continues to undergo massive acculturation. The economic problems have aggravated social problems because of the inability of individual Tongans to achieve their Western-induced desires. Housebreaking, theft, and unlawful entry are now prevalent crimes in Tonga and are, unfortunately, apparently increasing at a steady rate. Tongan homes now commonly have barred windows, and families may keep numerous dogs in the yard for protection. Crimes of violence have also increased, especially in attacks by Tongans on non-Tongans. The Tongan Minister of Police openly admits that in view of population pressures and economic side effects, continued potential increase of crime may reasonably be predicted.

In the face of their economic dilemma, it is not surprising that in their 1970-75 development plan, Tonga has assessed tourism as having the greatest economic potential to the Kingdom, both as an employer of labour and also as a source of foreign exchange.

### The Economic Role of Tourism

Tourists arrive in Tonga by private yacht, by cruise ships making a one or two-day stop as part of a longer Pacific itinerary, or by air from Samoa or Fiji. Guests to Tonga in 1958 were an elite group, when only three cruise vessels landed passengers at Tongatapu, and some special flights brought a total of sixty-four air passengers from Australia (Figure 2). Subsequently, tourism has grown steadily and rapidly, and more growth is anticipated, including tourism to areas other than Nuku'alofa. In 1973,

twenty-four cruise ships also called at Vava'u, approximately 180 miles north of Tongatapu, bringing 9,463 tourists to that island. In 1975, 17,500 tourists visited Vava'u as part of their cruise itinerary.

Figure 2  
Tourists to Tonga by Ship and Plane: 1958 to 1975  
(Landings at Tongatapu)

Year	Passengers	Number of Ships	In-Passengers	Flights
1958	1,715	3	64	n.a.
1959	2,600	5	45	8
1960	n.a.	7	189	23
1961	2,866	4	308	35
1962	3,677	6	524	66
1963	4,353	6	668	75
1964	5,626	10	992	117
1965	6,398	8	1,174	144
1966	14,581	20	1,460	146
1967	14,240	14	2,883	231
1968	11,111	12	3,465	182
1969	18,111	19	4,326	230
1970	21,025	24	4,001	324
1971	23,500	32	4,000	314
1972	27,259	29	4,599	358
1973	31,502	48	6,356	403
1974	36,308	43	6,403	397
1975	44,968	n.a.	6,770	n.a.

Sources: Kingdom of Tonga Premier's Report, 1958 +; Kingdom of Tonga (1970) DEVELOPMENT PLAN 1970-1975; P. D. Wallis 1971; A. Buchanan 1975. [n.a. = Not Available.]

The Director of the Tongan Visitors Bureau (TVB) wrote in 1973 that foreign exchange receipts generated through tourism amounted to approximately us\$2,154,000, making tourism the second largest generator of foreign exchange after copra (us\$3,052,000). In 1974 it was estimated that tourist revenue increased to approximately us\$3,270,000, and that projected tourist-generated revenue could possibly amount to as much as us\$15,300,000 by 1980. Tourism is definitely increasing in Tonga.

The Government of Tonga is interested in developing tourism for the apparent economic benefits. The TVB was created in 1971 to work towards that goal, and it is the TVB's function to disseminate information to promote tourism. A survey of tourist "likes" and "dissatisfactions" taken by the TVB indicated that many visitors felt that most Tongans did

not know enough of their own culture and history (or at least the aspects of touristic interest), so the TVB published a pamphlet for local distribution to remedy this particular complaint. The government has also built small airstrips to encourage tourist travel to outlying islands and has allocated substantial sums of money for hotel expansion and construction. With the help of overseas (primarily Australian) backing, new hotels have been recently constructed on Tongatapu and Vava'u. Japanese companies have also expressed an interest in joint investment with the Tongan government, in facilities that would serve the public and *especially* entice the now almost nonexistent Japanese traveler to Tonga. With Japan in mind, the Tongan monarch traveled to Japan, exchange clubs have been established, Tongans have been encouraged to visit Japan. Late in 1976 the Japan/Tonga Friendship Fellowship opened a us\$35,000 resort clubhouse in Tonga, in an effort to develop growing contacts and increase guests to Tonga. His Majesty also visited Hawaii in late 1976 to assess the role of tourism, as well as the role of Tongans in tourism at the Polynesian Cultural Center (see chapter 14).

Tourism, however, increases the economic problems—especially the need for additional imported foodstuffs. Air passengers, for whom facilities are largely being constructed, have to be fed, and although many enjoy the local fruits and bread (made from the imported flour), few would be content for long on the relatively bland Tongan diet of yams, taro, and fruit. Tongans are, in effect, competing with the tourists for the imported foods. The ever-increasing quantities of food that must be imported to feed the growing number of tourists contributes to the steadily rising CPI. A similar situation prevails in Fiji, as Ward (1976, p. 171) notes:

Some [Fiji] hotels, in the interest of greater economy and convenience, only provide a strictly limited choice of meals and the sort of meals which tourists expect to receive in their home countries, e.g. of the steak-hamburger-mixed grill variety. Many hotels argue that this is all the tourist wants although the best hotels do provide more extensive menus. The majority [of hotels, however] do provide the food which is produced and consumed by the local inhabitants and this compounds the problem of buying requirements from domestic producers.

Ward also states that despite the availability of many local foodstuffs tourists might consume, hotels in Fiji prefer to purchase their requirements overseas because, it has been argued, "they can only then be assured of continuity in supplies and of a consistent high standard of quality."

Tourism has grown rapidly in Tonga, but it could evaporate just as quickly. Tongans occasionally have experienced situations when the anticipated tourists failed to arrive. In 1972, at least forty tour groups cancelled their planned air visits to Tongatapu because the tour operators

could not be assured of making airline connections from the Kingdom to other points on the itinerary.

Because of mounting fuel and labor costs, long-haul cruises such as those that stop at Tonga are not as profitable as the short-haul, fast turn-around cruises that operate weekly or biweekly in the Caribbean (Waters and Patterson 1976). As a result, in the foreseeable future cruises stopping at Tonga might decrease as much as 50 percent in a single year, with a projected annual loss of revenue of us\$600,000. This would seriously affect the handicraft manufacturers and other businessmen in the Kingdom. Losses of anticipated revenue generated through tourism should serve to reinforce the potential disaster for Tongans if their economy is tied too closely to tourism.

It must also be noted that while short-term cruise passengers consume little of the imported foodstuffs, the airline guests (whose stay ranges from five to eleven days) must be fed for the duration of their visit. The host/guest competition for food and natural resources will further contribute to the upward inflationary curve.

### What Price Tourism?

Tongans are increasingly becoming the victims of their own tourism. They are exceedingly happy when cruise ships dock with a thousand passengers (and several hundred crew members), and pump thousands of dollars into the economy in an eight-hour period, but Tongans are even happier at dusk when the ships depart. The physical impact of a thousand tourists on one town situated on a relatively tiny island is tremendous, especially when most of the tourists are bussed around to "see" all the sights of the island. The tourist literature has brought the visitors here "to observe the traditional Tongan way of life in the *natives' own habitat*" and the shore excursions promise that you will "see the daily work routine of men and women—gardening, weaving baskets, cooking, washing and their many other activities. This village walking tour offers you an excellent opportunity to photograph the Tongan people as they really are" (Itinerary for the International Institute, 24 June 1974). Tongans cannot tolerate being regarded as members of a "cultural zoo" and are not "on display" for wealthy visitors. Under these circumstances, there are exceedingly few opportunities for a true host/guest relationship to develop.

Tourists have usually heard something about Tonga long before they arrive. Many guests remember the late Queen of Tonga's memorable ride in an open carriage during a rainfall when Her Majesty Queen Salote Tupou III attended the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in London in 1953. Tourists, therefore, already "know" something about



Tonga, and they want to "see" Tonga; but all too often cruise passengers get only a look at a "phony-folk-culture" in action—a Disneyland of the Pacific, so to speak.

The air guests, fewer in number (but staying longer), may have a somewhat different experience. They have the opportunity to enjoy the recreational facilities of a tropical island—swimming, fishing, and snorkeling—and they may also have the opportunity to see more of the island at a gradual pace, to meet some of the truly hospitable Tongans on a person-to-person basis, and to share a truly cross-cultural educational experience. However, the actual experiences of the tourist can be less than this ideal.

Forster (1964, pp. 217-22) pointed out that one of the fascinating aspects of the tourist process in the Pacific is the deliberate creation of a "phony-folk-culture," which the indigenous inhabitants develop to provide "authentic native culture" to the tourists. For example, a popular tourist "attraction" is a display of dances in Tonga: the program may contain almost a dozen Fijian, Tahitian, Hawaiian, or New Zealand dances performed by the Tongan dancers but show only one or two Tongan dances. The fact is granted that a Tahitian *tamure* has a tremendous amount of visual impact, and a Fijian fire dance is dramatic, but Tongan dances have a beauty and symmetry of their own that should be performed for the visitors to Tonga.

It is this alteration of their basic culture that has prompted Tongans to consider legislating the tourist industry. They seek to ensure the active preservation of the traditional Tongan way of life and culture by integrating traditional patterns into mass tourism and not making traditional culture a contemporary "phony-folk-culture."

Other tangible and observable social problems have developed in the Kingdom as a result of the tourist influx: some Tongan children now beg from tourists at the major tourist attractions; prostitution and homosexuality appear to be increasing (not necessarily for the tourists but for the crew members of the cruise ships); tourists are harassed as they walk through city streets and villages; and price-gouging, especially for transportation, is a common complaint.

The substantial amount of quickly-generated cash derived from cruise ship passengers (for an "authentic" Polynesian feast, shore excursions around the island, and the purchase of handicrafts), when placed into circulation in the port towns, can be the occasion for a party. Drinking may commence even before the ship has weighed anchor and drunkenness appears to be a major source of crime. Tongans still enjoy their traditional *kava* drink, but as I have stated elsewhere, when individuals begin to consume more alcohol than *kava*, in violation of their Christian ethic, it is an indication that the basic fabric of their culture and society has shifted. In recent years Tongans have been evicted from their own

hotels for drunkenness (and for being badly dressed) in order to "protect the image of the Kingdom in the eyes of the tourist." Housebreaking, theft, and unlawful entry are prevalent crimes, and in 1973, for example, there were 427 convictions for theft.

### Conclusions

Deep-seated economic problems induced by a growing population have almost engulfed the tiny islands of Tonga. The glitter of tourist money seemingly promises a substantial portion of much-needed economic help, but would it bring more "troubled times"? The current substantial cruise business might be considered relatively benign in that visitors are short-term, and they arrive and depart at a preappointed hour. Comparatively little capital or space is required to cater to their needs, aside from docking areas and taxis or busses. Further, the money cruise passengers spend is largely for local services (transportation, amusement, and for handicrafts as souvenirs) and directly benefits individuals. The threatened demise of the cruise industry, to be replaced with an increasing number of air travelers, may be potentially more disruptive to the economy and to the culture. To accommodate air visitors, hotels and resort facilities must be financed and built, and they occupy land—already in short supply, giving to it by virtue of location a changed economic value. No longer "bush" or "town," now it is "recreational" land. Given the small size of Nuku'alofa as well as Tongatapu, one must imagine the impact if one thousand guests were continually present, day *and* night, demanding that their needs be catered—including on Sunday when Tongans traditionally do not work. And although air travel is currently nascent, with a limited number of annual visitors, the advent of mass travel could "Waikiki" the beaches, and inundate local culture as has already happened in Hawaii.

The Prime Minister of Tonga (His Majesty's brother) has repeatedly stressed that Tongan culture can withstand the impact of modern tourism development. I, too, am certain that Tongans will survive; however, will they still be Tongans? Or will they become yet another example of a people who have been forced to abandon their traditions (or at least remove them "back stage" away from prying eyes) to prevent their becoming the "quaint customs" of ethnic tourism?

The anthropological analysis of economic process [here, tourism] differs from the statistical methods employed by economic planners in that the former assesses the impact upon culture and the social milieu rather than being restricted to balance-of-trade or the CPI. There is an ethnohistoric component to culture change—from then to now—just as there is a cross-cultural component—from there to here—that must be studied. Tongans must become aware of the changes that have occurred

as a result of non-Tongan influences; they must also study the effects of tourism elsewhere in the Pacific islands. From these two sources, they should design for the future. The 1970-75 development plan stated that tourism if properly controlled could make a positive contribution to the economy. Possibly the wording of a new development plan should read that tourism *must be* properly controlled if it is to make a positive contribution to the economy, the Tongan hosts, and the non-Tongan guests.

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